



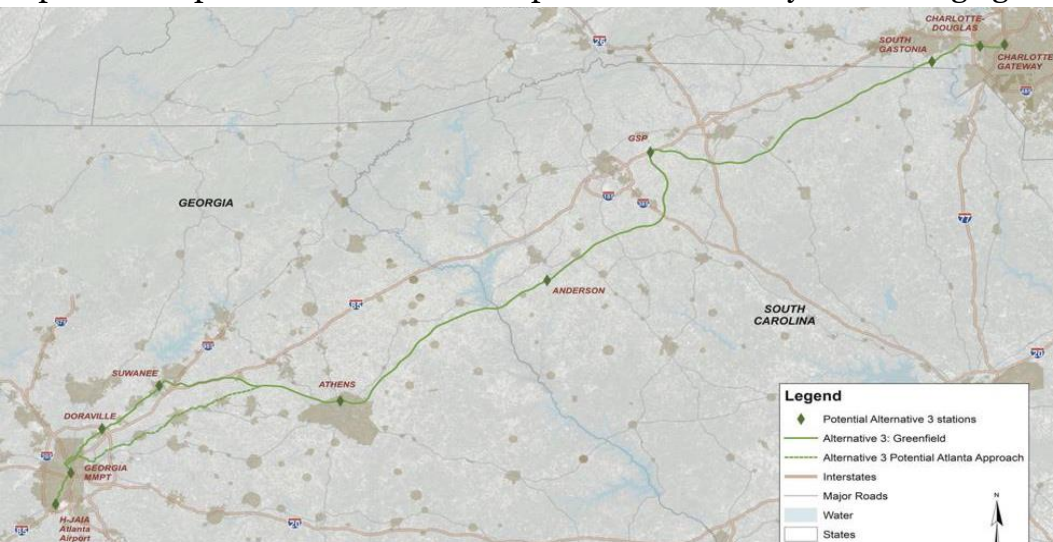
Supporting Quality Public Transit in Atlanta

June 2021 Newsletter

www.cfpt.org

BIDEN TOUTS ATLANTA-CHARLOTTE HIGH-SPEED RAIL

President Joe Biden is voicing support for building a high-speed passenger train line between Atlanta and Charlotte. In a speech marking Amtrak's 50th anniversary, Biden asked his audience to "imagine a two-hour ride" between the two cities, much faster than the current Amtrak trip time of five-and-a-half hours. Amtrak has endorsed a proposal that could cut the ride to five hours even, but Biden was apparently referring to a much more ambitious plan under study by the Georgia Department of Transportation and the Federal Railroad Administration. As reported in previous issues of the CfPT newsletter, the plan calls for building a completely new rail line that could link Atlanta and Charlotte in as little as two hours and six minutes. Passage of the Biden Administration's "American Jobs Plan" could help provide funding. Also known as the "infrastructure bill," the legislation as it presently stands would include \$80 billion for rail projects and \$85 billion for the modernization and expansion of public transit. US Transportation Secretary Pete Buttigieg visited the Atlanta Beltline



Shown in green, this proposed high-speed rail line would run from Hartsfield-Jackson International Airport through downtown Atlanta and Athens to Anderson, SC, Charlotte Douglas International Airport and downtown Charlotte. Trains running at up to 220 mph could make the trip in as little as two hours, six minutes (Georgia Dept. Of Transportation map).

offices in May to promote the initiative. Several members of Georgia's Democratic Congressional delegation joined him to show their support, but the bill's future is uncertain. Many Republicans have denounced it as being too expensive, with some saying any infrastructure funding plan should be limited to roads and bridges. As of this writing, Congress has not scheduled any votes.

SLOWER BUT MORE RELIABLE?

While Atlanta looks ahead to the possibility of faster trains, Atlanta's only current Amtrak service has just gotten slower. The Crescent runs between New Orleans, Atlanta, Charlotte, Washington, DC and New York, mostly on the Norfolk Southern Railway. For many decades, the Crescent's popular overnight schedule between Atlanta and Washington made it possible for travelers to spend a full day in either city without taking a red-eye flight or booking a hotel room, but in recent years, late arrivals made that option less practical. During fiscal 2020, the Crescent ran behind schedule more than half of the time, with the average delay working out to an hour and 26 minutes per delayed passenger. Amtrak blamed Norfolk Southern, saying NS -- like many of Amtrak's other host railroads across the country -- gives track priority to its own freight trains. Federal regulators recently developed new rules designed to keep passenger trains on time, but they also instructed Amtrak to negotiate new schedules that are easier to keep. A slower Crescent schedule went into effect June 7, the same day the Crescent resumed daily operation after last year's Covid cutbacks. While the newly negotiated schedule may well be easier to maintain, the morning Washington arrival that so many riders liked has vanished. Instead of leaving Atlanta after dinner and arriving in Washington after breakfast, the northbound Crescent now leaves Atlanta at 11:29 p.m. and it doesn't arrive in Washington until mid-afternoon. The southbound Crescent schedule got a milder makeover. It arrives in Atlanta just 30 minutes later than before, at 8:43 a.m., but running time to New Orleans has been lengthened by an hour and-a-half, delaying the Crescent's arrival in the Crescent City until 9:02 p.m. It remains to be seen whether the new schedules will actually improve timekeeping.

ADVOCATES WANT STREETCAR UPGRADES

MARTA is proceeding with plans to extend its Edgewood-Auburn streetcar line up the Atlanta BeltLine, but BeltLine transit advocates are calling for upgrades to the streetcar service before that happens. BeltLine Rail Now says that while it strongly supports the extension, the streetcar's long-standing problems need to be fixed now, before they affect the extended route. Among BLN's recommendations: streetcar frequencies should be increased from every 15 minutes to every 10 minutes, and the hours of operation should be

extended to match other MARTA services. The group also says connections with the heavy-rail system could be improved with a new stop at Luckie Street and Forsyth Avenue, near the Peachtree Center rail station. Since the streetcars operate on pavement shared with cars and trucks, they are subject to delays caused by vehicular traffic. BeltLine Rail Now says synchronized traffic signals prioritizing the streetcars could help, and MARTA officials say they have been considering that option. It's worth noting that Atlanta recently decided to ban cars and trucks from a small portion of Edgewood Avenue during summer weekends. Permanently banning vehicles from a longer stretch of Edgewood could go a long way toward improving streetcar service!

STREETCAR EXTENSION ROUTE, STOPS IDENTIFIED

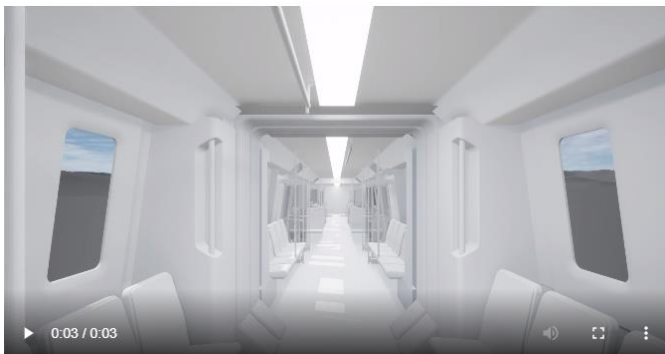


MARTA map shows current streetcar line in gray and planned expansion in green. Green circles indicate locations of stops along the extension.

Atlanta's Edgewood-Auburn streetcar line opened at the end of 2014, running from Centennial Olympic Park to the historic Sweet Auburn neighborhood. In a recent update on its plan to expand the line onto the BeltLine's East Side Trail, MARTA said it intends to extend the tracks further east on Edgewood Avenue, adding a new stop near the intersection of Edgewood and Boulevard. The line would then head north on Randolph Street and northeast on Auburn Avenue to a stop at Old Water Tower Park near the Krog Street Market. From there, the extension would head a short distance east on Irwin Street before turning north to run along the BeltLine for 1.4 miles, stopping at Ralph McGill Boulevard before terminating at Ponce City Market on Ponce de Leon Avenue. Construction is scheduled to begin in 2024, and the extension is scheduled to open in 2027. MARTA will be taking public comment on its extension plans until June 30. You can take a survey at <https://www.streetcar-east.scoutfeedback.com>.

NEW DETAILS ON MARTA RAILCAR DESIGN

MARTA is revealing more about the plans for its next generation of heavy-rail equipment. The 254 new railcars will feature modernized electronic signage, more comfortable seating and enhanced video surveillance. MARTA also says doors between cars will be replaced by “gangways” that will allow riders to change cars more easily. Other interior details are still being worked out. The new railcars will be manufactured in Utah by Switzerland-based Stadler Rail. MARTA expects to receive a pilot car next year, followed by regular deliveries between 2023 and 2028. The new equipment will replace railcars that have been running for up to half a century.



Gangways will replace doorways in MARTA’s new railcars, allowing riders to move throughout the train more easily (MARTA illustration).

MARTA EXPANDS CLAYTON OPERATIONS

Six years after Clayton County joined MARTA, the transit agency continues to expand its Clayton County footprint. It’s purchased 31 acres of land in Forest Park for an operations and maintenance center. And it’s proposing two new bus routes operating out of Riverdale Town Center. Route 197 would run along Valley Hill Road, Battle Creek Road and Mount Zion Road to a terminal near the intersection of I-75 and I-675. Route 198 would run along Georgia 138 and Southlake Parkway to Southlake Mall. Both routes would operate on 60-minute frequencies, with 45-minute frequencies in effect during peak periods. An existing MARTA line that serves the same area, Route 196, would see some relatively minor routing changes. Public hearings are being held this month. If approved, the new service will begin Aug. 14.

COBB MULLS TRANSIT WISH LIST

Northwest suburban Cobb County is gathering suggestions for its new “Cobb Forward” Comprehensive Transportation Plan. The 2018 Georgia law that established the ATL regional transit authority designated Cobb as one of 13 counties eligible to levy a 30-year sales tax to fund transportation, and planners are trying to identify projects that could go before the public during a possible 2022 referendum. Initiatives could include anything from an expansion of the CobbLinc bus system to the introduction of MARTA rail service. Three town hall meetings and an online survey were conducted in May.

ALL STOPS

The Biden Administration’s 2022 budget proposal calls for a 35% increase in Amtrak funding.... Following recent track improvements, Amtrak has received approval to run trains at up to 110 mph on a 45-mile stretch of its Chicago-Detroit “Wolverine” line.... With Covid concerns easing, sleeping car passengers on Amtrak’s western long-hall trains again get traditional dining car service; Here in the East, food service will still be limited to prepackaged meals, handed out over the counter or delivered to bedrooms... There’s still no word on when post-pandemic Brightline trains will resume running between Miami and West Palm Beach, FL, but construction of a 170-mile extension between West Palm Beach and Orlando International Airport is now said to be 50% complete... In what could be a bad omen for US intercity bus service, Greyhound Canada is going out of business... Georgia Gov. Brian Kemp has signed legislation earmarking \$6 million for improvements at MARTA’s Buckhead rail station... MARTA has completed the installation of 326 digital train status signs... The United Way of Greater Atlanta donated 40,000 Breeze cards to provide transit to Covid vaccination sites... MARTA employees who worked through the Covid Pandemic will get a \$3,500 bonus... ATL Xpress has opened a new park-and-ride bus stop on Hickory Grove Road in Ackworth... Augusta Transit says a driver shortage has led to bus cancelations and delays for riders... Macon teenagers can buy \$25 passes for unlimited rides on local buses this summer.